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Cold War News Can Help Or Hinder

The saturated news coverage given to the space flight of astronaut Alan B. Shepard Jr. helped tremendously to boost the prestige that the flight engendered for the United States, especially in all parts of the free world. Free and unlimited reportage of this historical event was in sharp contrast to the controlled and hushed-up coverage permitted by the Russians when their man made an orbital flight around the earth on April 12.

It was not unusual to hear suggestions before the Shepard flight that the United States refrain from publicizing its first attempt to put a man into space, for fear of the humiliation that would ensue if the flight were a failure. But the flight turned out almost perfectly, and all the world was allowed "to take part in the fantastic adventure." Thus was purveyed one of the many great differences that exist between a closed and open society. Anyway, as President Kennedy pointed out, this kind of enterprise has to be exposed to the public in a free society.

But another big news story that

came out of Florida and the Caribbean area a few weeks ago harmed rather than enhanced the country's prestige. The ill-fated Cuban invasion perhaps could not possibly have succeeded as it was planned and undertaken, and thus the failure could not be attributed to all the premature and exaggerated publicity it received. Nevertheless, if there had been any chance of success, the invasion attempt doubtless would have been thwarted by all the news given to the recruiting and training of Cuban refugees for the venture, one that was supposed to be a highly covert operation of the U. S. Central Intelligence Agency.

The Cuban fiasco has raised doubts whether the United States can really engage in clandestine operations against the spread of communism if the press is free to print advance news of such ventures.

There are times, of course, as in case of war or other situations that threaten the national security, when those of us in the news dissemination business must exercise self-restraint. That this can be done without imposing governmental censorship or abridging the rights of a free press was proved possible by the self-censorship employed by the press during World War II.

Cold War reporting possibly calls for the same kind of restraint and responsibility that a sports editor exercises when he gives full publicity to a forthcoming athletic event without revealing the home team's weaknesses, signals or secret strategies.